

Tonkin Records Reveal Conflicts In U.S. '64 Stand

McNamara Disputed on Viet Foray

By Richard Harwood
Washington Post Staff Writer

The Senate Foreign Relations Committee yesterday disclosed a major discrepancy in the Johnson Administration's public explanation of the Tonkin Gulf incidents that provoked the first bombing attacks on North Vietnam in 1964.

The transcript of Defense Secretary Robert McNamara's seven-hour appearance before the Committee on Tuesday reveals that:

- The Commander of the American Task Force in the Gulf had specific knowledge of "3A4 Ops"—raiding forays by South Vietnamese ships against North Vietnamese installations.

- He indicated the North Vietnamese thought his patrol was part of these forays.

- The North Vietnamese were ready to treat his patrol as enemies.

- As a result he required air cover.

This directly contradicted McNamara's earlier version of what had transpired on Aug. 4, 1964, when the USS Maddox and USS C. Turner Joy reported a torpedo attack by North Vietnamese craft.

McNamara had told the Foreign Relations Committee on Aug. 6, 1964, that Maddox and Joy were not involved in South Vietnamese raiding operations against North Vietnam and that they had in no way provoked the Aug. 6 engagement.

"Our Navy," he said then, "played absolutely no part in, was not associated with, was not aware of any South Vietnamese actions, if there were any. I want to make that very clear to you. The Maddox . . . was not informed of, was not aware of, had no knowledge of, and so far as I know today has no knowledge of any South Vietnamese actions in connection with the two islands of North Vietnam."

Contrary to this statement, the Task Force Commander, Capt. John J. Herrick who was

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aboard Maddox, cable his superiors on Aug. 3:

"(a) Evaluation of info from various sources indicates DRV (North Vietnam) considers patrol directly involved with 3A4 ops (by South Vietnamese raiders). DRV considers U.S. ships present as enemies because of these ops and have already indicated their readiness to treat us in that category.

(b) DRV very sensitive about Hon Me, believe this is PT operating base, and the cover there presently contains numerous patrol and PT craft which have been repositioned for tracking and spotting and allowing no international water working space for air craft.

(c) Under these conditions 15 minutes reaction time for obtaining air cover is unacceptable. Cover must be overhead and controlled by DDEs (Maddox and Joy) at all times.

Members of the Committee, led by Chairman J. William Fulbright, questioned McNamara severely on this and other contradictory information developed at the hearing.

Called Ambiguous

The Secretary's reply was that his original statement to the Committee on Aug. 6, 1964, may have been "ambiguous" in disclaiming any knowledge by "our Navy" of South Vietnamese raiding operations.

"I feel the Congress and the country were misled about the closeness of operation of DeSoto patrol by Maddox and Joy and the South Vietnamese raids . . ."

"I know I have been misled," Gore went on. " . . . I feel that I was misled that this was an entirely unprovoked attack, that our ships were entirely on routine patrol. The fact stands from today that they were intelligence ships, that they were under instructions to agitate North Vietnam radar, that they were playing close to the shore . . ."

Fulbright and Senator Wayne Morse (D-Ore.), took substantially the same position. There are even doubts, Fulbright said, about the nature of the North Vietnamese attack on Maddox and Joy, doubts that were raised in a second cable from Captain Herrick following the attack.

"Review of action," Herrick

As for Captain Herrick's cable, McNamara declared:

"We can find no basis for the commander making this statement, that the DRV considered the DeSoto (Maddox and Joy) patrol directly involved in 3A4 operations."

"Second, Herrick himself now states that he can recall no basis for coming to that conclusion."

"Well," Fulbright responded, "you are not saying this cable was sent."

"I simply stand on what I said," McNamara replied. "Of course, the cable was sent."

Herrick said yesterday in a telephone interview that his warning cable reported that the North Vietnamese considered his ship involved with 3A4 ops. But, Herrick said, he "had only a vague idea" of what 3A4 ops was. "I had been told to stay clear of some areas," he said. "They were sometimes in that area . . . but I did not know what they were doing."

McNamara retired from the Pentagon next week and his testimony presumably stood as his farewell to the long controversy over the Tonkin Gulf events. These events have caused deep divisions within the Foreign Relations Committee and have raised in the minds of some Committee members grave doubts about the "credibility" of the Johnson Administration.

Misled, Gore Says

At the conclusion of McNamara's appearance, Sen. Albert Gore (D-Tenn.) declared: "Let me state quite candidly my feeling of doubt and question . . . I feel the Congress and the country were misled about the closeness of operation of DeSoto patrol by Maddox and Joy and the South Vietnamese raids . . ."

"I know I have been misled," Gore went on. " . . . I feel that I was misled that this was an entirely unprovoked attack, that our ships were entirely on routine patrol. The fact stands from today that they were intelligence ships, that they were under instructions to agitate North Vietnam radar, that they were playing close to the shore . . ."

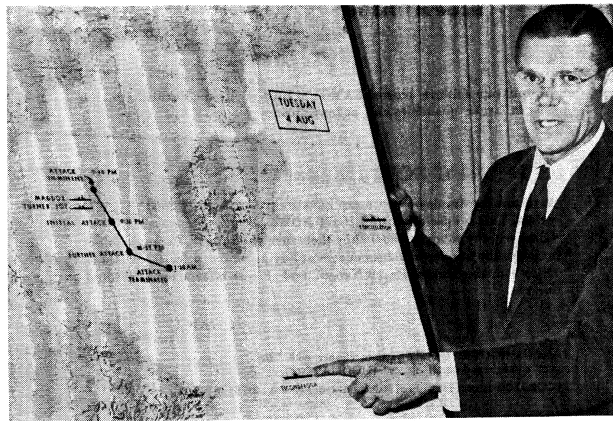
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Aug. 6, 1964: Defense Secretary McNamara outlines incidents which had occurred two days previously in Tonkin Gulf.

informed the Pentagon a few hours before the retaliatory bombing strikes were ordered, "makes many reported contacts and torpedoes fired appear doubtful. Freak weather effects and over-eager sonar-men may have accounted for many reports. No actual visual sightings by Maddox suggests complete evaluation before any further action."

Greatest Regret

Of this cable, Fulbright said:

"If I had known of that one telegram, if that had been put before me on 6th of August, I certainly don't believe I would have rushed into action (in support of the Tonkin Gulf Resolution which backed expanded military operations in Vietnam) . . ."

"It never occurred to me that they were the slightest doubt, certainly on the part of Commander Herrick who was in charge of the task force that this attack took place. He had obviously had doubts . . . I feel a very deep responsibility, and I regret it more than anything I have ever done in my life, that I was the vehicle which took that resolution to the floor . . ."

McNamara replied: " . . . I

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don't believe Commander Herrick in his cable stated he had doubts about the attack took place in the light of subsequent developments."

However, Senator Frank Lausche (D-Ohio), charged that the Foreign Relations Committee staff had used the inquiry "to prove that we should not have done what we did." The staff report, Lausche said, was one-sided and biased and was designed "to show that there was falsehood presented" by the Administration.

No Personal Blame

Despite all this, Fulbright assured McNamara that "I don't blame you personally for this . . . I never meant to leave the impression that I thought you were deliberately trying to deceive us."

Senator Mike Mansfield, the Democratic Leader, said at the end of McNamara's testimony that he believed the Secretary "was being as candid and as honest as he could be" in his 1964 statements.

"I still feel the same way," Mansfield said. McNamara's credibility, said Sen. John Sherman Cooper (R-Ky.) was not at issue. "His testimony," said Cooper, "has been helpful and forthright . . . Accepting the fact of the engagement (on Aug. 4), and I do, there remains a question of judgment whether the scope of the engagement was such that a resolution should have been presented, and also whether in hindsight Congress should have voted one."

The transcript reveals sharp disagreement within the Committee over the purpose of the Tonkin inquiry, as well as disagreement over what the inquiry had proved, if anything.

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"The purpose," Fulbright said at the outset, "is not to assess blame on anyone. There will be crises in the future and I think it will be helpful to future Senators and future Secretaries of State and even future Presi-

McNamara was able to monitor some North Vietnamese naval radio nets, but was not equipped to activate North Vietnamese radar installations. "Secretary McNamara was misinformed," Herrick stated, when he told the Committee the Maddox was equipped to perform that task. Later yesterday, the Defense Department issued a statement confirming Herrick's remarks on the Maddox equipment.

The patrol got underway on July 30, 1964 "as a sort of Sunday cruise," Herrick said this week.

Hot Pursuit Curbed

On Aug. 2, following an attack on Maddox by three PT boats, Herrick's superiors ordered him and supporting aircraft to avoid "hot pursuit of enemy vessels closer than 11 miles from shore and the aircraft were not allowed to carry on hot pursuit closer than 3 miles from shore."

The Aug. 4 attack, according to McNamara, occurred about 11 p.m. Approximately 12 hours later, the U.S. responded with 64 air strikes against North Vietnamese naval bases.

During that 12-hour period, said McNamara, conflicting accounts were being received by Herrick's superiors and by Washington. Accordingly, McNamara said he called the Pacific Naval Commander, Admiral U.S.G. Sharp and said: "We obviously don't want to carry out the retaliatory strike unless we are damned sure what happened."

New messages went out, McNamara said, and it was determined from "a highly classified and unimpeachable source" that the attack had actually occurred.

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"The identity or nature of this 'source' was not revealed by McNamara, and Gore commented: "Great reliance has been placed . . . upon this unidentified, unimpeachable, highly classified source. Twice in his statement (McNamara) has quoted that source as reporting something which the evidence does not support. So for security reasons,

"The primary purpose of this is to determine DRV coastal activity . . . Other specific intelligence requirements are as follows: (a) location and identification of all radar transmitters . . . (b) navigational and hydro information . . . (c) monitoring a junk force . . . (d) sampling electronic environment radars and navigation aids, (e) photography of opportunities in support of above."

This was the fourth such patrol off the North Vietnamese coast, McNamara said, and its mission "was not primarily electrical surveillance, but it also had that as one of its several items to be carried out."

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Probe Due in Case Of Tonkin Witness

United Press International

Defense Secretary Robert S. McNamara has promised a thorough investigation of a report that a Naval officer was "picked up and sent to a psychiatric ward" after discussing the Tonkin Gulf incident with the Senate Foreign Relations Committee.

In testimony released yesterday, Committee Chairman J. William Fulbright, the officer was in the Pentagon's Navy war room on the nights of the Tonkin Gulf incidents, "and he wanted to relieve himself of a burden."

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